

Message Text

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TAGS: EG, IS, PINR

SUBJECT: INTSUM 547 - APRIL 20, 1978

LONDON FOR KINSOLVING
PARIS FOR NICHOLAS MURPHY
OTHER ADDRESSEES FOR CHIEFS OF MISSION

1. LEBANON. IN WHAT MAY BE A DESPERATE ATTEMPT TO PREVENT THE CHRISTIANS FROM TAKING RADICAL ACTION, THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT RESIGNED YESTERDAY. SARKIS HAS ASKED PRIME MINISTER AL-HOSS AND HIS CABINET TO REMAIN AS CARETAKERS UNTIL A NEW GOVERNMENT CAN BE FORMED. ASSUMING THAT CONSTITUTIONAL PROCEDURES ARE FOLLOWED, SARKIS, IN CONSULTATION WITH SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF DEPUTIES KAMAL ASSAD -- A SHIA MUSLIM -- WILL DESIGNATE A SUNNI MUSLIM TO FORM A NEW GOVERNMENT.

2. THE GOVERNMENT CRISIS APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN BROUGHT ON BY GROWING PRESSURE FROM THE CHRISTIANS ON THE SARKIS GOVERNMENT AND THE LEBANESE MUSLIMS TO MOVE AGAINST THE PALESTINIANS AND TO LIMIT SYRIAN DOMINATION OF LEBANON. THE RENEWED FOCUS ON THE PALESTINIAN ISSUE AROSE IN THE WAKE OF THE ISRAELI INVASION OF SOUTHERN LEBANON WHICH

DROVE HUNDREDS OF ARMED PALESTINIANS INTO BEIRUT. THESE PALESTINIANS WERE VIEWED AS AN IMMEDIATE THREAT BY THE CHRISTIANS. SOME OF THE CHRISTIANS, LED BY SHAMOUN, IN CONJUNCTION WITH CONSERVATIVE SHIA MUSLIMS, WERE PRESSING TO DEBATE THE PALESTINIAN QUESTION IN PARLIAMENT TODAY IN AN ATTEMPT TO FORCE MUSLIM LEBANESE TO CHOOSE BETWEEN
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COOPERATING WITH THEM OR THE PALESTINIANS.

3. THE PARLIAMENTARY SESSION --ORIGINALLY SCHEDULED FOR TODAY-- WOULD HAVE BEEN A DISASTER. THE MUSLIMS WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN ABLE TO MAKE THE CHOICE. THE CHRISTIANS, FOR THEIR PART, MIGHT HAVE MOVED UNILATERALLY TO DECLARE THE PARTITION OF THE COUNTRY. WE HAVE RECEIVED NUMEROUS REPORTS THAT EVEN LEADING CHRISTIAN MODERATES, SUCH AS SARKIS, GENERAL KHOURY, AND FOREIGN MINISTER BOUTROS, HAD SERIOUSLY DISCUSSED PARTITION. AT THE VERY LEAST, A DEBATE IN PARLIAMENT WOULD HAVE SEVERELY STRAINED PALESTINIAN/LEBANESE RELATIONS.

4. THE SYRIAN ISSUE ALSO HAD BECOME A SERIOUS PROBLEM. FOLLOWING THE CLASHES LAST WEEK BETWEEN THE SYRIANS AND CHRISTIAN MILITIA, CHRISTIAN LEADERS HAVE CRITICIZED THE SYRIANS FOR FAILING TO KEEP THE PALESTINIANS UNDER CONTROL AND FOR USING HEAVY WEAPONS AGAINST THE CHRISTIANS. THE SYRIAN OVERREACTION TO SNIPERS FROM CHRISTIAN NEIGHBORHOODS GAVE CREDENCE TO CHRISTIAN ALLEGATIONS THAT THE SYRIANS WERE OCCUPIERS AND ANTI-CHRISTIAN. YESTERDAY, PHALANGE MILITIAMEN TOOK TO THE STREETS, SAYING THEY WOULD ENSURE PUBLIC SAFETY SINCE THE SYRIANS WERE NO LONGER RELIABLE.

5. BEHIND THESE TWO ISSUES IS A GENERAL DISILLUSIONMENT IN LEBANON OVER THE PERFORMANCE OF THE SARKIS GOVERNMENT.

HE HAS BEEN INCREASINGLY CRITICIZED BY THE MUSLIMS FOR BEING CONTROLLED BY THE CHRISTIANS; AND THE LATTER, IN TURN, CALL HIM A SYRIAN PUPPET. EVEN HIS OWN MINISTERS WERE HIGHLY CRITICAL OF THE PRESIDENT'S PERFORMANCE. ONE MINISTER REPORTEDLY SAID RECENTLY THAT SARKIS HAD NEVER TAKEN A FIRM DECISION IN THE GOVERNMENT'S 16 MONTHS IN OFFICE.

6. AGAINST THIS BACKGROUND OF GROWING CRISIS, THE CABINET
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RESIGNATION MAY BE A MEANS OF BUYING TIME FOR SARKIS AND PUTTING OFF A SERIOUS RIFT IN LEBANON. INDICATIONS ARE THAT THE NEXT GOVERNMENT, WHICH MAY TAKE WEEKS TO FORM, WILL BE COMPOSED OF POLITICIANS RATHER THAN TECHNOCRATS. THIS CHANGE HAS BEEN DEMANDED BY LEADING CHRISTIANS FOR MONTHS. THEY HAVE ARGUED THAT THE

TECHNOCRATS, HAVING NO POLITICAL FOLLOWING, COULD NEVER GENERATE THE SUPPORT FOR THE HARD DECISIONS NEEDED FOR THE RECONSTRUCTION OF LEBANON. THIS CONCESSION TO THE CHRISTIANS APPARENTLY WAS ENOUGH TO KEEP THEM FROM PRESSING THE PALESTINIAN ISSUE WITH THE MUSLIMS AT THIS TIME; THE PARLIAMENT SESSION SCHEDULED FOR TODAY HAS BEEN CANCELLED.

7. THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE CHRISTIAN CONCERN OVER THE PALESTINIAN ISSUE APPARENTLY MADE A DEEP IMPRESSION ON THE MUSLIMS. TUESDAY, FOR THE FIRST TIME IN OVER A YEAR, BEIRUT'S LEADING MUSLIM POLITICIAN, SAEB SALAM, MET WITH SHAMOUN AND GEMAYEL. MOREOVER, 25 DEPUTIES OF ALL FAITHS MET AND DISCUSSED KEY ISSUES. THE MUSLIMS APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN SUFFICIENTLY CONCERNED OVER THE POTENTIAL CHRISTIAN REACTION IF SOMETHING WERE NOT DONE THAT THEY AGREED TO THE FORMATION OF A "POLITICAL" GOVERNMENT AND TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A DIALOGUE.

8. THE LITMUS TEST FOR THE FUTURE OF THIS DIALOGUE WILL BE THE WILLINGNESS OF MUSLIM LEADERS TO JOIN THE NEW CABINET. IN PARTICULAR, IF A PROMINENT SUNNI MUSLIM POLITICIAN AGREES TO BECOMING PRIME MINISTER, A SMALL BUT SIGNIFICANT STEP TOWARD RECONCILIATION WILL HAVE BEEN TAKEN. NEVERTHELESS, THE BASIC DIVISIONS WILL REMAIN, AND THE CABINET'S RESIGNATION CAN AT MOST PACIFY THE
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CHRISTIANS FOR A FEW MONTHS.

9. SHOULD SARKIS FAIL TO GET A PROMINENT SUNNI TO AGREE TO BECOME PRIME MINISTER, THE CHRISTIANS COULD DECIDE TO

PRESS FOR FULL PARTITION. THEY COULD VIEW THE FAILURE OF THE SUNNIS TO SUPPORT A GOVERNMENT AS CONFIRMING THE CHRISTIAN VIEW THAT THE MUSLIMS HAVE NO LOYALTY TO LEBANON. SARKIS, BY ACCEPTING THE CABINET'S RESIGNATION, THEREFORE, HAS TAKEN A CONSIDERABLE GAMBLE TO BUY TIME AND POSSIBLY TO TAKE A SMALL STEP TOWARD RECONCILIATION. (SECRET)

10. UNIFIL. THE PROSPECTS ARE GOOD THAT THE EIGHTH SPECIAL UNGA (APRIL 20-21) WILL ADOPT THE NORWEGIAN DRAFT RESOLUTION WHICH PROVIDES FOR THE FINANCING OF UNIFIL ACCORDING TO THE SAME SCALE AND PATTERN OF ASSESSED CONTRIBUTIONS USED FOR UNEF AND UNDOF. USUN REPORTS THAT THE RESOLUTION WILL BE SUPPORTED BY ALL THE ARABS, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF ALGERIA, IRAQ, LIBYA, SYRIA AND SOUTH YEMEN WHICH WILL ABSTAIN. THE SOVIETS AND EAST EUROPEANS ARE ALSO EXPECTED TO ABSTAIN AND TO WITHHOLD THEIR PAYMENT OF THEIR ASSESSED SHARE AT LEAST AS LONG AS THE IDF

IS IN LEBANON; THE SOVIETS WILL CONTINUE TO ARGUE THAT ISRAEL SHOULD PAY THE FULL COST OF THE OPERATION. AT THE SAME TIME, HOWEVER, THE ARABS AND THE SOVIETS INTEND TO SEIZE THE OPPORTUNITY TO HOLD A POLITICAL DEBATE CRITICIZING ISRAEL FOR ITS INTERVENTION IN LEBANON. (CONFIDENTIAL)

11. ISRAEL. DECISIONS ON SETTLEMENTS BEYOND THE GREEN LINE ARE NOW BEING MADE BY THE MINISTERIAL COMMITTEE ON SECURITY AFFAIRS HEADED BY BEGIN. UNTIL NOW, ACCORDING TO EMBASSY TEL AVIV, THE FULL CABINET HAD BEEN RESPONSIBLE FOR THE APPROVAL OF NEW SETTLEMENTS, AND THE MINISTERIAL SETTLEMENT COMMITTEE HEADED BY SHARON HAD DEALT SECRET

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WITH THE OTHER ASPECTS OF SETTLEMENT. THIS SHIFT IN AUTHORITY IS BEGIN'S METHOD OF ENSURING THAT DECISIONS ON SETTLEMENTS ARE MADE AT THE HIGHEST GOVERNMENT LEVEL AND AVOIDING A REPETITION OF LAST MONTH'S INTERMINISTERIAL SQUABBLES OVER SETTLEMENT POLICY. AUTHORITY NOW WILL REST WITH BEGIN FOR KEY SETTLEMENT ISSUES AND NOT WITH EITHER SHARON OR WEIZMAN.

12. AN AUTHORITATIVE GOVERNMENT SOURCE WAS QUOTED AS SAYING THAT 14,000 ISRAELIS ARE NOW LIVING IN THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES -- 4,750 ON THE WEST BANK, 2,600 IN THE RAFAH APPROACHES, 1,000 IN SOUTHERN SINAI AND 4,000 ON THE GOLAN HEIGHTS. EMBASSY TEL AVIV BELIEVES THESE FIGURES ARE HIGH. YEDIOT REPORTED THAT THE MINISTERS OF AGRICULTURE AND FINANCE HAVE DISCUSSED THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A COMPANY TO PURCHASE LAND ON THE WEST BANK. THE ISRAELIS HAVE BEEN HAVING DIFFICULTIES IN PERSUADING LOCAL ARAB RESIDENTS TO DEAL OPENLY WITH THEM. MEANWHILE, FOURTEEN

NEW SETTLEMENTS WITHIN THE GREEN LINE WERE AUTHORIZED --
EIGHT IN GALILEE AND SIX IN THE NEGEV. (CONFIDENTIAL)

13. EGYPT. THE INFLUENTIAL EGYPTIAN JOURNALIST MOHAMMED HAYKAL, LEFTIST SYMPATHIZER AND CONFIDANT OF FORMER PRESIDENT NASIR, YESTERDAY DELIVERED ANOTHER ATTACK ON THE SADAT GOVERNMENT AND URGED PRESIDENT SADAT TO ACKNOWLEDGE PUBLICLY THE FAILURE OF HIS PEACE INITIATIVE. HAYKAL'S VIEWS ARE RECEIVING WIDESPREAD ATTENTION AND ARE CONTRIBUTING TO A BROADENING ATTACK ON SADAT FROM POLITICAL OPPONENTS EMBOLDENED BY THE STALEMATED PEACE TALKS AND BY POPULAR GRUMBLING OVER THE ECONOMIC SITUATION IN EGYPT.

14. LAST WEEK HAYKAL OBJECTED TO A "CAMPAIGN OF SLANDER" AGAINST NASIR, ATTACKED THE EGYPTIAN GOVERNMENT'S CENTRIST
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PARTY FOR ITS CORRUPTION AND IMPLICITLY CALLED ON NASIRITES AND LEFTISTS IN EGYPT TO UNITE-PRESUMABLY IN OPPOSITION TO SADAT.

15. SADAT FIRED HAYKAL FROM HIS JOB AS EDITOR OF THE INFLUENTIAL CAIRO DAILY AL AHRAH IN 1974. HAYKAL'S COMMENTS-HIS FIRST IN AN EGYPTIAN PAPER SINCE 1974-APPEARED IN AL AHALI, A LEFTWING PAPER THAT BEGAN PUBLISHING IN FEBRUARY. EGYPTIANS WILL WATCH CLOSELY THE GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE. IF SADAT TRIES TO SILENCE HAYKAL, THE LEFT WILL LABEL SADAT'S POLITICAL "LIBERALIZATION" PROGRAM A SHAM. IF SADAT ALLOWS THE HAYKAL CHALLENGE TO CONTINUE, OPPONENTS ON BOTH THE LEFT AND RIGHT WILL BE ENCOURAGED TO PRESS THEIR ATTACKS. (CONFIDENTIAL) CHRISTOPHER

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